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ABSTRACT

The Educational Management Development Center (EMDC) seeks to build the organizational capability for problem-solving through a process offered in the context of a dynamic, operating system. The problem-oriented school manager is helped by support staff to take administrative theory, successful practices, personal experiences, and leadership qualities to transform his own development to yield relative insight. The support staff helps apply and analyze real problems over time. Also, designed to formulate, maintain and monitor the decision-making of school systems, EMDC is systematically testing which problem-solving capabilities can be improved in local schools, and subsequently contribute to the development and maintenance of behavior in schools via guided problem-solving and management development activities. (Author/DW)

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IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS

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A PROJECT
IN COLLABORATION WITH

/I/D/E/A/

CHARLES F. KETTERING FOUNDATION

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JEAN E. SANDERS

IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE

OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS

A Look at the Problem

There is a dearth of systematic attention to the issue of decision making on the part of school managers. Numerous studies provide descriptions of the underdevelopment of management education. (1) (2) Decision making at middle-management levels is seriously deficient, and the training of school leaders is today one of the most pressing problems in public school education. (3)

It has often been recommended that educational managers from LEA's engage in a systematic search for better management structures and processes, and yet we have not had the appropriate mechanisms to carry this forth. The schools can no longer wait for universities to equip them for the leadership training job to be done. (4) And, it has been proposed that new training institutes be established that are free of the outmoded approaches and vested interests which have only added to the school system problems. (5) It has also been suggested that schools might turn to industry for specialists in management development. In several states the rise of School College Centers has been encouraged to deal with these identified problems. (6)

The EMDC project (Educational Management Development Center) has provided insights from the initial year of operations at Merrimack. It appears at this time that merely offering training for individuals does not effect change at the organizational level nor does it address complex institutional concerns. The National Institute of Education has cited a lack of support systems to nurture and sustain beneficial change. (7) This has been corroborated by our initial examination of the problem. Early on in the project we found it necessary to address directly the needs, problems, and issues of local educational managers as they perform effectively in daily operations. To have an eventual impact on school organizations at the macro-system level the leadership training must be directed to the improvement of educational management competencies within the local school system. And, the training activities must focus on the school planning process, be based on assessed needs of the district, and demonstrate district-wide educational planning. (8) The ultimate goal, and thus the purpose for training leadership personnel, is to build the organizational capability for problem-solving behaviors through practices and processes offered within the context of the operating system.

Although the person is central to innovation and improvement of educational systems, (9) we have decided to concentrate upon his effect within a complex interacting environment. We envision leadership as such a powerful force that it can be related to more than one behavior change. . .at the personal and organizational levels. (10) From this initial viewpoint we have formed our implications concerning leadership and innovation in schools.

Identifying, Analyzing, and Building Solutions

From a heightened awareness of the complexities of school systems at the macro-system level, we have delineated an active program for the refinement and delivery of management education. As we reflected upon the EMDC project through internal planning it was determined that we must extend our conceptual framework beyond management systems to encompass socio-political, economic systems. According to Schon (11)

> . . .if we are to learn to solve new kinds of public system problems we must learn to create the systems for doing so and to discard structure and mechanisms grown up around the old set of problems.

There is increasing awareness that the educational manager operates within the socio-political environment that constrains and conditions his behavior. (12) As the scope of the situation appears to be growing, we are finding it necessary, indeed imperative, to think in terms of social systems in which educational management is imbedded.

As action research, the EMDC is designed and activities conducted in relation to the organizational aspects within the context of a dynamic system. In looking at educational systems many outside consultants suggest a systems approach to change which follows a linear model. (13)

Basic Sequence for Problem Solving
Seven Systematic Stages

1. Identifying Problem
2. Analyzing the Problem
3. Generating Multiple Solutions
4. Designing Plans for Action
5. Forecasting Consequences
6. Taking Action
7. Evaluation

A new dimension to the sense of change and innovation indicates that given conditions do not always enable the manager to take a pro-active stance within this linear model. The existing system requires not only a pro-active role but also a re-active mode. It can be concluded that it is often inappropriate to adopt the standard rationalist approach of first defining goals then seeking means appropriate to achieve them efficiently, (14) logical though this strategy might be.

Insights gained through the EMDC seem to support the contention that it is necessary to "try out systematic innovations and assess their consequences through a process approach." (15) The process approach assists the EMDC in assessing the consequences of alternative strategies and adapting innovations that need to be switched, recombined, and transformed as they are applied. The reliance upon the rationalistic, linear models may well have prevented this transformation from occurring and too long hindered our understandings of major organizational level innovations. The rationalistic approach might better apply if we could temporarily suspend operations of schcol systems to allow systematic planning; the rationalistic approach might then prove more valid in the re-creation of the educational enterprise.

A New Kind of Learning

Our experiences have suggested the link to improving management is best achieved within the problem-solving perspective. From this vantage point we are able to better identify specific considerations necessary to relate the key steps of a typical design process to the complexities of a pro-active situation. The designer of the EMDC learns to deal with the reality issues of constraints existent and appreciate the strains placed on the process by the educational setting. Designing, as a series of decision-making activities, is highly interdependent one step with the other and is iterative rather than linear. Selection of the needs to be addressed leads to other choices such as the identification of system variables and criteria that, in turn, require decisions based on expected system output and how best to obtain it. (16)

Still a further constraint in establishing innovative systems is that school districts have less role differentiation, fewer problem-solving experts, and a smaller number of support services than other social organizations. (17) This is suggested as the reason that management development programs in industry are more apt to emphasize problem solving as opposed to theoretical development.

There is wide variation from system to system with respect to organizational capability to engage in innovation and problem solving. At the organizational level, few systems can anticipate and analyze problems in the pro-active sense. Their capacity to search for or generate knowledge that might be useful in solving problems or to make management plans for the utilization of that knowledge is lacking.

> The capacity for systematic problem-identification and solution development and testing is uncommon in local schools. Additionally, a lack of capacity for sustaining the process of reform and renewal also characterizes the educational school district. (18)

The operational manager is problem-oriented and we must help him cope with what is hurting him personally. This problem orientation makes it necessary that activities be related specifically to the educational context. In the course of working towards the problem-solving goal, there is ample opportunity to examine reactions, events, and outcomes having a bearing on implicit objectives. We have seen educational managers discover and use new approaches for example even as they make useful adaptations and search for new tools, thus raising our expectations about what the EMDC shall be able to accomplish in the long run as programs develop.

The educational manager should be able to take administrative theory, successful practices, personal experiences and leadership qualities to perform transformation in his own development. Like learning generally, the process approach to management development is virtually continuous yielding relative rather than absolute gains in insight.

The analytical experiences are extended over time, during the working experience of the administrator, and are applied to problems and critical issues that he selects. The support and assistance from EMDC establishes a local capability to test out new management tools for possible improvements.

The support and assistance is provided by staff and consultants who work with both researchers and practitioners (practicing school administrators). Figure 1 indicates the Technical Assistance Matrix. This type of multi-site, multi-form linkage enhances the project's effectiveness.

The Collaborative Climate

The EMDC is designed to formulate, maintain, and monitor the decision making of school systems. In a previous AERA paper, (19) Lavin has presented the essential attributes of communications theory and innovation as these processes become institutionalized through a collaborative. The collaborative, the primary linker, provides necessary support, technical assistance, and coordination for consultants, field, and extension agents (the secondary linkers). It is the organization of the collaborative that serves as the resource and support mechanism and synchronizing system thus initiating and sustaining relationships with multiple client systems. Analytical capabilities that exist within one or more local colleges and universities as well as participants from public and private sectors are involved to link providers and clients. (20) However, the primary goal is to stimulate and draw together local initiative in the educational management enterprise.

In five selected school districts, the EMDC is testing systematically the extent to which problem-solving capabilities can be improved in local schools. The major purpose of these studies is to examine those elements that contribute to the development and maintenance of behaviors in schools via guided problem solving and management development activities. The problem-solving studies tap available expertise already existing in school systems. (21) These sources and resources are identified by project staff and consultants and then supported and utilized in project efforts. The expected result is for school systems to develop capacity to be more analytic in their behavior, more sophisticated in their choice of resources, and better able to assess critically the effectiveness of what they are doing or are proposing to do.

Strategies utilized through the EMDC enable us to evolve specific techniques for transforming management approaches to new situations. The administrative evaluation study in an urban community can be exchanged with the teacher evaluation study in a second community. (See Figure 2.)

FIGURE 1

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MATRIX

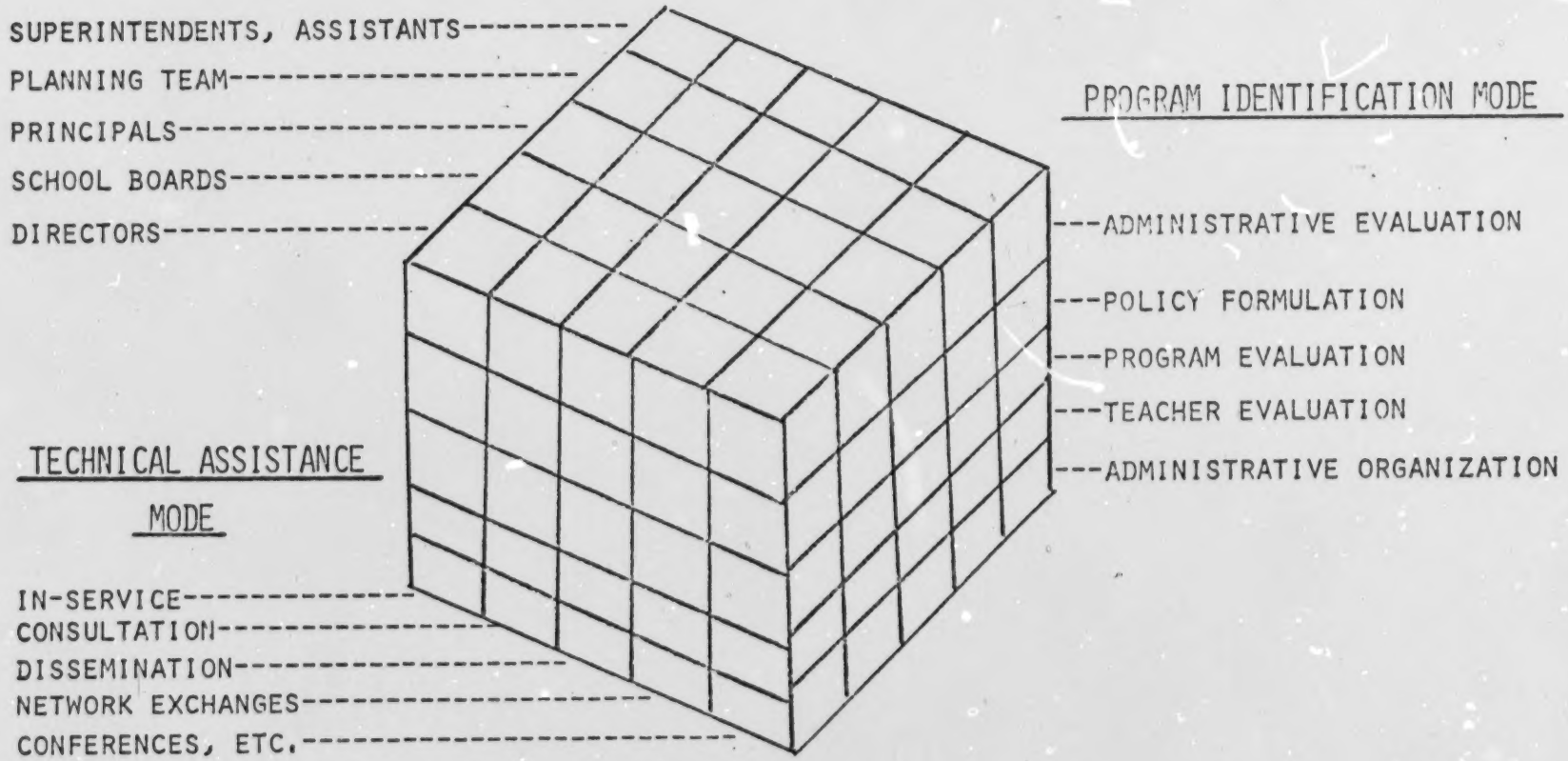


FIGURE 2

PROBLEM-SOLVING STUDIES

EVENTS	COMMUNITY A (URBAN)	COMMUNITY B (RURAL)	COMMUNITY C (SUBURBAN)	COMMUNITY D (SUBURBAN)	COMMUNITY E (URBAN)
• REQUEST PROPOSALS • SELECT PROJECTS • INTERVIEW PROJECTS • CONTACT CONSULTANTS • SELECT CONSULTANTS • SITE VISITATIONS • ASSESS NEEDS • DETERMINE PRIORITIES • DEVELOP ACTION PLAN • SCHEDULE MEETINGS • DESIGN INFORMATION COLLECTION FORM • PROVIDE RESOURCES • SELECT APPROPRIATE RESOURCES • DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION PLAN • FACILITATE ADOPTION • INSURE CONTINUANCE • EVALUATE PLANS	ADMINISTRATIVE EVALUATION	TEACHER EVALUATION	POLICY FORMULATION	PROGRAM EVALUATION	ADMINISTRATION ORGANIZATION

Although the initial point of entry is through the door of "real-life problems," the ultimate aim of sharing through seminars will additionally relate theory to practice. The benefit of taking this approach is to obtain an emerging framework of practical experience and successful practices coupled with sound administrative theory.

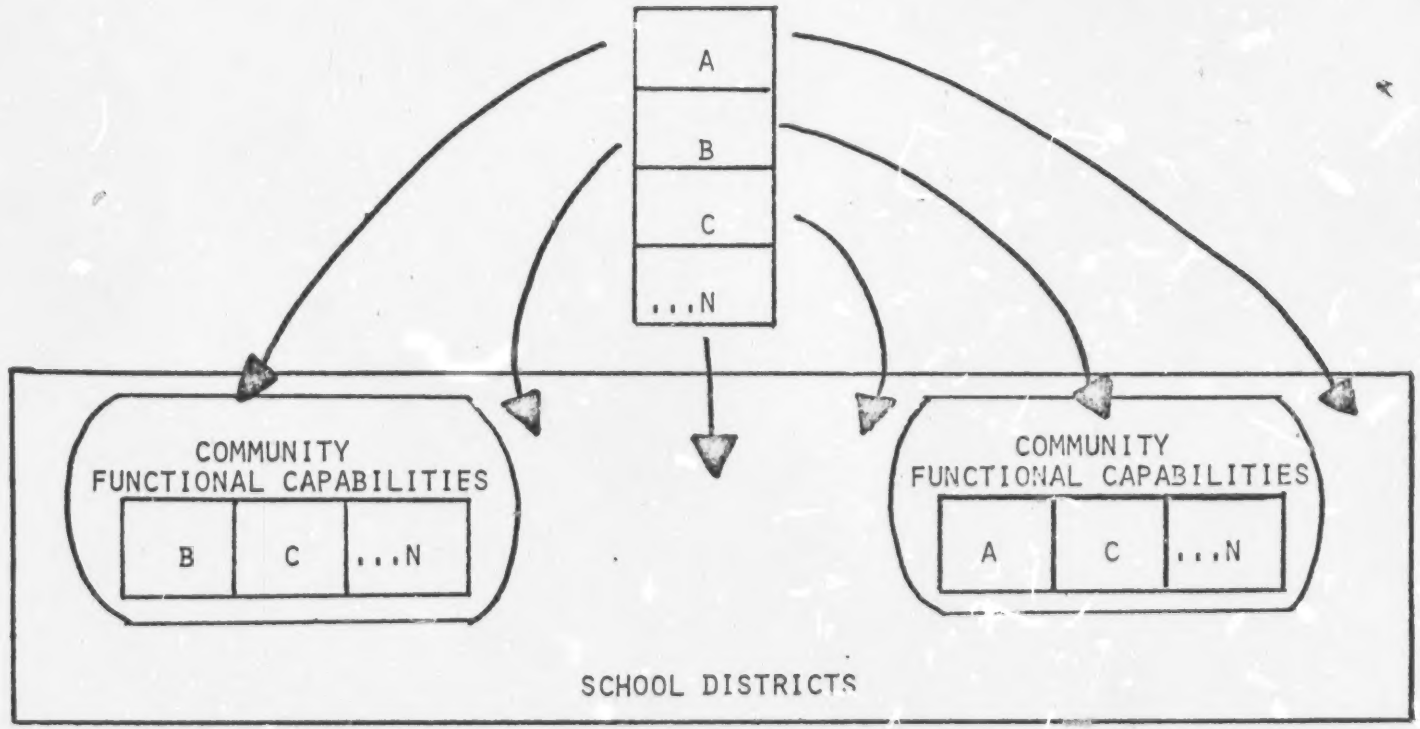
Assisted by project staff, and input from consultants, practitioners apply theoretical concepts in the field. The emphasis is upon application to problems and "getting one's hands dirty" in operational aspects while seminars are concerned with reflecting upon implications for formal course work and theory in the area of leadership and management development.

The problem-solving study becomes the incentive to complete a thorough analysis to serve the needs of a local system rather than focusing on the more generic problems of a region. At a later date, the local problem-solving studies are shared and linkage occurs through "functional complementarity." Complementarity is not a new concept to education. As Lessinger (22) has indicated, ideas are complementary when each is a valid and necessary explanation of the same phenomenon yet each one is in some conflict with the other. Individual differences from urban to rural to suburban communities are balanced by commonalities. Conflicts between opinions of superintendents, teachers, and other administrators can be resolved. The collaborative environment facilitates the transfer of management insights from one locale to another. (See Figure 3.) The unique strategies permit us to evolve and transform specific techniques to management practices in education in successively new situations. Implicit in this approach is the viewpoint that innovations derive only after we have built a body of organized experience applied to specific problem-oriented situations.

The EMDC now seeks to expand the skills and support that we as a collaborative are able to assemble and make available for the Merrimack Region. The EMDC approach enables us to look more sharply at the social system dominating the management issues while at the same time testing alternative solutions to these problems. Specialized technical support is provided to those undertaking the solution of these problems indicating a growing awareness that educational management demands insights from many sources.

FIGURE 3

COLLABORATIVE FUNCTIONAL COMPLEMENTARITY



FUNCTIONAL COMPLEMENTARITY

As a field application project, this EMDC study is devised to determine how the educational system interacts with the school's unique market structures. Intervention strategies are designed to gain a better appreciation and understanding of the dynamics of the system and specific problems which effect its ability to be accountable. We still need to know more about the incentives affecting internal school system operations. These incentives for being responsive and accountable should emerge as the project develops further.

Through a collaborative climate of the EMDC, new sets of benefits flow from project activities. Results of the planning seminars are readily shared and disseminated. Problem oriented activities, focusing on a specific situation and located on the manager's own turf, satisfy the client needs. And, at the same time, the collaborative network allows the sharing of experiences across district lines. In addition, the EMDC project is testing whether the collaborative use of consulting is helpful for the problem oriented enterprise.

We recognize that only by providing efficient ways to meet the identified needs will we have adequate resources to address the questions to which our strategy brings us. The EMDC must, therefore, seek out, design and test elements of a delivery system, identify new materials and delivery methods.. . new intervention strategies using a novel mix of proven and accepted process techniques (such as case studies, consultations, formal seminars), in working on real field problems as well as conducting and managing the process of education. The project is aimed to develop interventions necessary to influence organizational changes while keeping the control of these interventions within the grasp of the school system managers themselves.

The individual's performance improvement is integrated with the organizational level of innovation. The EMDC is directed towards building increased potential and capacity to improve the capabilities of educational managers while improving the educational systems. By engaging local educational agencies in a systematic search for better management structures and processes, the EMDC also illuminates the specific competencies of educational managers through performance appraisal. One way that this is accomplished and now being tested as the project develops is through the identification of necessary competencies of educational managers. (See Figure 4.) Reality testing is once again applied since we examine competencies of educational managers as they deal with problem solving in high priority operational areas.

FIGURE 4

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP APPRAISAL

DIMENSION/EXERCISE MATRIX

	ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION EXERCISE	CREATIVITY EXERCISE	ANALYSIS PROBLEM/WRITTEN PRESENTATION	
1. PLANNING & ORGANIZATION	XX		X	
2. MANAGEMENT CONTROL	XX			
3. USE OF DELEGATION	XX			
4. WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS	XX			
5. ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS			XX	
6. PROBLEM ANALYSIS	XX	X	X	

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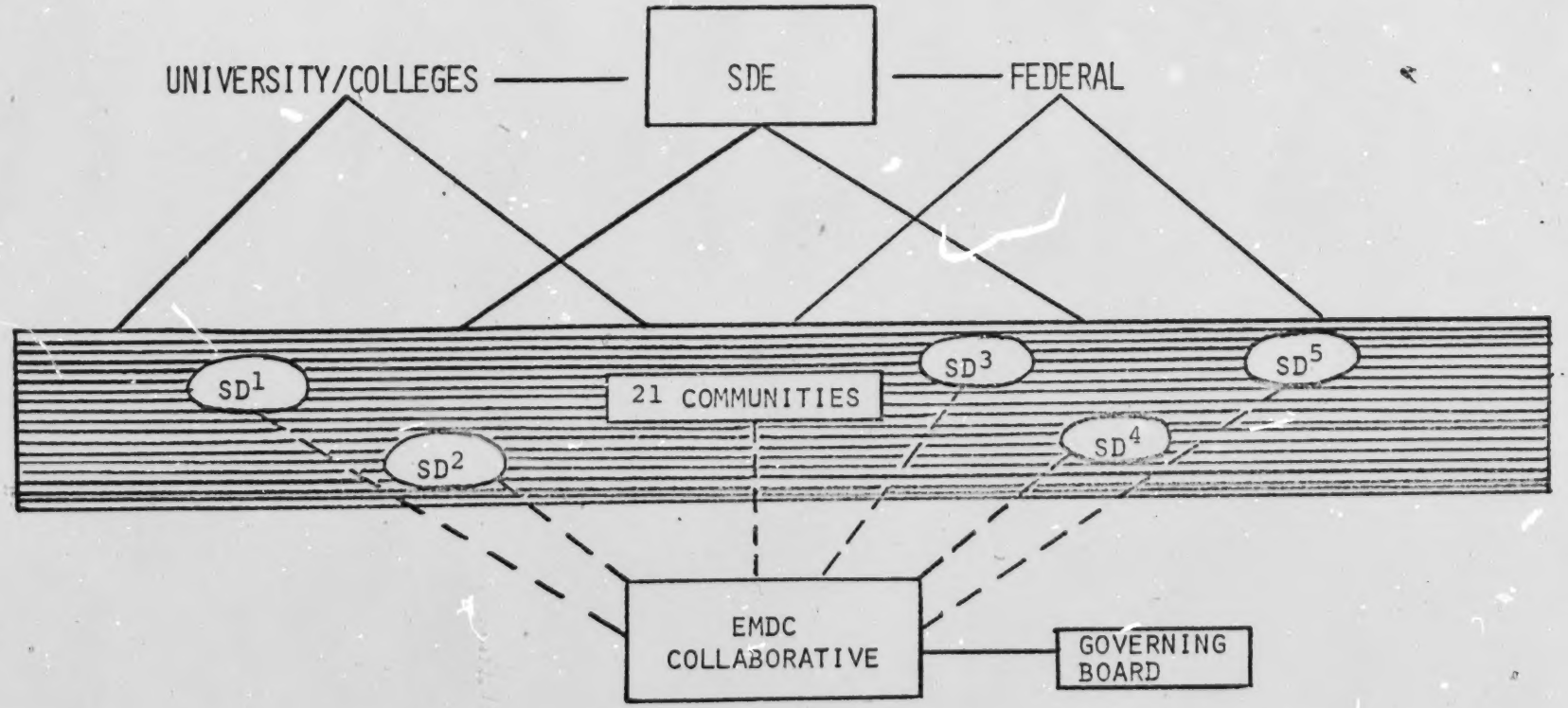
We have found it necessary to deal with the whole, though the subcomponents are in dynamic and creative tension. (23) This tension yields results and effects more productive than those produced separately. Such tension is a genuine expression of the way things are and then we are able to transform the insights into a powerful, positive synthesis at the policy level. The impact results from the capability of the inter-systemic linkages. The administrative team links problem solving with leadership training thus bridging the gap between theory and practice. The linkage among agencies unites multi-purpose, inter-disciplinary agencies within an interlocking change support network. (See Figure 5.) The network is the most viable mechanism for product support (knowledge utilization) and change support (structural o.d.).(24) Dissemination is accomplished through the transferability and replication of the models, programs, and services.

FIGURE 5

LINKAGE MODEL



PRODUCTIVE CO-EXISTENCE - URBAN-SUBURBAN-RURAL COMMUNITIES

VOLUNTARY COLLABORATION

SD = SCHOOL DISTRICT

CONCLUSIONS: Emerging Role for Centers.

For the manager to employ new practices related to his major problems--even when such practices exist "on the shelf"--he must examine the problem in association with policies. Our teaching and problem-solving models must explicitly relate to policy issues. It may, in fact, prove beneficial in stimulating managers to test new techniques to enter the problem through the policy door. The problem-solving components of this EMDC project are concerned with relationships between organizations and their socio-political environments.

Policy issues and organizational structures are needed to design and bring into being the institutional processes through which new problems can continually be confronted and old structures continually discarded. (25) The resultant data from the problem-solving studies should shed new light upon the means by which new policies might come into effect. It is of course one thing to "discover" that policy issues are important to our managers and another to respond effectively. We recognize opportunities within the EMDC activities to explore the connection between policy and practice. Such things as the shared policy file and procedures for revealing the operational implications of alternative policies now appear to be worth considering.

The task of understanding the educational manager is demonstrated to call for a multi-disciplinary approach. We must increasingly call upon the political scientist and the sociologist as well as obtain the cross-discipline insights of the industrial management specialist to help us understand the context in which the educational manager operates. Increased attention to the interaction of project design with the socio-political environments promises a more effective relationship between the creators of educational systems and the operators of those systems.

It is still too early in the study to come forth with any finite set of pronouncements relative to what is the new concept of "center." We realize as we examine the performance of management in education that the improvement of these functions determines in some sense the role of the Center. Our assumptions initially are directed to the local school system and the management of the educational enterprise. Acting as a support system to the many school districts provides in the study a dual focus to both the management aspect of local schools and the linking notion of the Educational Management Development Center.

As the Center develops a degree of effectiveness in linking with the local schools in a supportive and facilitating role, new avenues of study emerge. Forthcoming are such notions as the multi-disciplinary approach, single vs. multi-purpose centers, primary vs. secondary operations, to name but a few. Working with educational managers enables the Center to gain insights into the problems of school systems at levels of organization much different and in many ways more complex than the various parts of the system, i.e., the complex institutional concerns.

Implications from the study, therefore, suggest new insights not only in relation to the operating school districts, but also to the concept of "center." Centers and cooperatives in their various forms exist throughout the country (26) in large numbers as formal and informal organizations. The results of a management link to the operation of local schools through a collaborative mechanism provide a perspective on the operation of the Centers that can be quite advanced. Findings from the study should suggest in essence not only new avenues for the improvement of educational management at the local level but enlightened views on the management of Centers themselves whether they operate as school-college centers, policy centers, or completely new operational relationships.

FOOTNOTES

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